

dallasnews OPINION

Powered by *The Dallas Morning News*

91°

FORECAST



TRAFFIC



Walter J. Humann: Non-DART cities, here's why the time is right to join in



10

2

0

Share

1



Published: 21 July 2013 08:09 PM

Updated: 21 July 2013 08:09 PM

DART will celebrate its 30th anniversary on Aug. 13. It's a transit system that provides 110 million passenger trips per year, helping ease congestion and air pollution and stimulating extensive private-sector investment.

In the 1983 election, we urged Dallas-area voters to approve a full 1 percent sales tax, which today has:

Paid for commuter rail, light rail (the most extensive in the nation), a bus system, HOV-managed lanes and other transit elements.

Covered 80 percent of operating costs (fares cover just 20 percent).

Cushioned against economic downturns.

Ensured that DART receives its fair share of federal transit funding.

Today DART would be just a bus-only system if voters had approved less than that 1 percent.

DART's major capital program, bringing improved service to its 13 area service cities, will continue. But now is the time to encourage non-DART cities to consider joining. They hold the key to expansion and the region's ability to have one of the best transit systems in the nation.

There are strong reasons for a city to join:

On March 5 of this year, DART approved a policy that allows a new city to join without dedicating a full 1 percent sales tax up front. This avoids having to raise taxes, but voter approval would still be required.

Expansion can stimulate private investment. In many DART cities, every \$1 invested in rail stations resulted in a three- to tenfold increase in private investment.

Its residents will have broader, affordable commuting access not hampered by rising highway congestion or weather.

Transit can help sports-oriented cities move large numbers of people.

National and international event planners and corporations favor cities with public transit.

The more cities that help combat congestion, air pollution and urban sprawl, the greater the impact throughout the region.

A 1 percent sales tax will ultimately be required to fund a quality expansion and avoid a bus-only system surrounding DART cities. Finding that availability of uncommitted cash at the local level has been the problem. Polls have consistently indicated that citizens living in cities not served by transit want public transit and even would support increasing sales tax beyond the 2 percent local cap to fund transit.

However, we have not been successful in persuading Austin officials to increase the 2 percent cap, even with local voter approval. So we have to work within the cap.

Fortunately, DART voted to not require a full 1 percent initially. Instead, if the city will forgo future development debt or free up some other commitments, over time the city can shift its sales tax up to a full 1 percent for transit — the level DART cities have been paying since 1983.

If just 13 larger cities joined DART, sales tax revenue would exceed \$170 million a year — 40 percent of DART's present \$433 million collected per year.

The decision to join DART is a local matter. For that reason, in the early 1980s, separate transportation task forces were formed in each of Dallas' 14 single-

member districts and in each major suburb in Dallas and Collin counties. In this way, the voter decision to create DART and approve a 1 percent sales tax was determined exclusively by local citizens and officials. They studied the issue, worked with interim DART staff on service plans, and 13 cities voted “yes.” That same approach is suggested for each non-DART city today.

I urge a large number of non-DART cities to unite and view with favor this unique opportunity to expand and thereby benefit their cities and the region. The goal is to provide seamless public transportation to the largest number of people possible and at reasonable cost. Transit expansion will allow our region to grow, provide greater access for its citizens, create new jobs and improve the quality of living here.

Walter Humann is a North Texas civic and business leader who has been involved in transportation and funding issues for more than 30 years. His email address is whumann@huntoil.com.

Did you see something wrong in this story, or something missing? [Let us know.](#)

Comments

To post a comment, log into your chosen social network and then add your comment below. Your comments are subject to our [Terms of Service](#) and the privacy policy and terms of service of your social network. If you do not want to comment with a social network, please consider writing a [letter to the editor](#).



Login to post a comment

0 Comments

[RSS](#) | [Subscribe](#)